

Diversity & Unity in the Body of Christ

1 Corinthians 12 v 12-27

Context:

Every local church is meant to be a small colony or branch of the global Kingdom of God. The Bible is clear that the Kingdom of God is both diverse and unified, and the local church should therefore reflect this unity in diversity in its common life and membership. We may see this diversity, for example, in gender, age, social background, and ethnic and cultural heritage. Such diversity enriches the church and is a powerful sign to the world of what God has done in Christ to unify disparate people by the Holy Spirit and through faith in Jesus. In his first letter to the Christians in Corinth, the apostle Paul uses a graphic image to illustrate this truth, and we are going to explore this in today's study.

Observation:

1. What image does Paul compare Christ to in v 12 and what features of this image does he draw our attention to?
2. What markers of diversity does Paul mention in v 13 and what role does the Holy Spirit play in creating unity according to this verse?
3. What does Paul imagine different parts of the body saying in v 15-16 and what comment does he make about these declarations?
4. What rational statement does Paul make in v 17?
5. What declaration does he make in v 18?
6. What conclusions does he make in v 19-20?
7. What does Paul imagine different body parts saying in v 21?
8. What does Paul say in v 22-25?
9. What kind of solidarity and unity does Paul speak of in v 26?
10. What is his conclusion in v 27?

Meaning:

1. In v 12 Paul draws a comparison between a human body and Christ, but do you think he is literally referring to Jesus here or something else? What do we read in the rest of the passage to help us answer this question?
2. In what sense are Christians baptised by the Spirit and given the Spirit to drink (v 13) and how does this create unity in the body of Christ?
3. In v 13 Paul mentions just two markers of diversity – ethnic/cultural heritage (Jew & Greek) and social/economic status (slave and free). What other markers of diversity might we see in today's world and to what extent do we see such diversity in the church?

4. In v 15-16 Paul gently tackles the problem of self-exclusion due to low self-esteem and comparing oneself to others. Why and how do we see this manifested in the church today and what can be done about it?
5. In what ways is v 18-19 both a rebuke and an encouragement to the church?
6. In v 21 Paul address the problem of exclusion by others due to their prideful and arrogant attitude. Why and how do we see this expressed in the church today and what is the solution according to v 22-25?
7. Can you think of any real-life examples of the solidarity Paul describes in v 26?

Application:

1. As evangelicals we often tend to think of the Gospel in very individualistic terms as personal salvation. Of course, personal salvation through faith in Jesus is biblical and absolutely necessary. However, personal salvation is a means to an much greater end, a corporate end. What does this passage teach us about the corporate effects of the Gospel and how might this be good news for our world today?
2. What might be some of the practical actions we can take at St James to better reflect Paul's teaching in this passage?

Pray:

- Thank God for the Church, the body of Christ, it's unity and its diversity.
- Ask God to help you to better reflect Paul's teaching in this passage.
- Ask for forgiveness where you have excluded others and for healing when you have been excluded by others.